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Legislative Black Caucus Discusses African American Education Initiatives and Proposed Budget Cuts with CSU Chancellor and Presidents

Members of the California Legislative Black Caucus met with California State University Chancellor Charles B. Reed and more than a dozen CSU presidents and trustees in Sacramento, Monday to discuss "CSU Super Sunday," the education system's partnership with African American churches, and other educational issues facing minority students.

"CSU Super Sunday" is an African American educational outreach initiative launched in 2006, during which CSU presidents, trustees, board members and the Chancellor visit more than 50 large African American churches in Southern and Northern California to increase greater awareness of the opportunities for higher education at the 23 California State campuses.

On selected Sundays throughout the state, CSU representatives deliver a message to black church congregations of how to access higher education and the importance of a college degree to a young person's life, as well as providing information and material on admissions, financial aid, the application process, student services and degree programs.

Chancellor Reed told Caucus members of his concern about the low number of African American students, especially males who are attending college and graduating, and the state university's efforts to find more ways to reach out to them as tomorrow's emerging work force.

While vowing not to whine, Reed made an appeal to the legislators, "When the state has an $18 billion budget problem, you've got to work it out. You've got to cut some and add some," Reed said. "California's economy is sick and…the California legislature has got to put a dose of strong medicine out there. Swallowing it is hard, but you can't take 10 percent cuts across the board and also take care of children."

"California is at the crossroads," Reed said. "It has to decide if it is going to fund world-class prisons or fund second-class universities. Somebody has got to stand up and say we are not going to take it any more. There has to be a balance."

Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus, assured the college administrators that the Caucus recognized the importance of adequate funding for education and the benefits to their specific constituents.

"We have a clear sense of what the choices are," Ridley-Thomas said. "This is about investing in intellectual capital and the workforce of our state. It requires a certain kind of investment. That investment has to be in education, which is competing with other important issues like health care. There are hard choices to be made and we value the input."

Institutional support for CSU as a percentage of the total state budget has declined every year since 2000, according to a staff report. And there has been a proposed cut of $386 million in the 2008-09 CSU budget.

Such a reduction could result in the closing of five of the system's smallest campuses, course reductions, increased class sizes and longer graduation times at all 23 campuses.

LBC members attending the dinner were Senator Ed Vincent (D-Los Angeles), Assembly Member Sandre Swanson (D-Oakland), Assembly Member Wilmer Amina Carter (D-San Bernardino), and Assembly Member Curren Price (D-Los Angeles).

CSU Trustees in attendance were Trustee Herb Carter and Trustee Glen Toney. CSU Presidents attending were: Robert Corrigan (San Francisco), Alex Gonzales (Sacramento), Milt Gordon (Fullerton), Horace Mitchell (Bakersfield), and Jim Rosser (Los Angeles).

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